

# **Record of Sermons delivered during the month of April 2019**

(added progressively after each Sunday)

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(see following pages)

## **It's Better to be a Christian**

per S Olyott

(review so far)

We're continuing our study of Hebrews. Today we come to what, in many ways, is the climax of the letter.

These Hebrews were Jews. They had become Christians. They were thinking of giving it all up. They hadn't done so yet, but they were thinking of it, and going back to Judaism. It's particularly important this morning that we keep that in mind otherwise this passage, more than most, won't make much sense. We must remember that they were tempted now, to give up the Christian faith. One of the reasons was because they were being persecuted for being Christian Jews. And we saw last time why there has to be, persecution in the Christian life. There were many difficulties in their Christian life: as there are in yours. It has to be so! A person who claims to be a Christian and has no difficulties in his life, is no Christian.

Clearly from last week, your life, if it is without trouble, is not a Christian life. There has to be trouble. Every genuine Christian has trouble.

Well what's the Apostle going to tell them next? He's going to tell them two things: Verses 18 to 24, tell us the first thing. It's better to be a Christian than a Jew. Then verse 25 to the end of the chapter, he's going to tell these Christian Jews, and us: The higher your privilege the greater your responsibility. (next week)

(18 to 24) It's better to be a Christian than a Jew.

The Apostle makes this point in a most ingenious manner. The way he does it: he compares two mountains, making it plain that it's better to be on one mountain than the other. The first mountain that he refers to is Mount Sinai. It's not named as such, if you look at verse 18. But it's completely obvious what mountain he's talking about! You'll remember that it was from Mount Sinai that the Ten Commandments were given. God himself came down and met with Moses there. Not only the Ten Commandments but almost all the legislation of ancient Israel. Almost all the rites and ceremonies, sacrifices and tabernacle priesthood, we're all instituted, in detail, at Mount Sinai. He uses that mountain as a symbol of Judaism.

Then he switches from Mount Sinai, to Mt Zion which is named in verse 22.

Now every Jew knew, what Mt Zion was: it is the mountain on which Jerusalem is built. Going up to Jerusalem and the Temple was a very different experience from going to Mount Sinai! The Jews loved to go up to Jerusalem. They went up in joyous pilgrimages. Great processions! Great crowds of relatives and friends and neighbours. Three times a year they were expected to be there. It was always a time of great joy and reunion. Quite, quite different, from Mount Sinai.

And yet that earthly Jerusalem is only a 'picture' of the real Jerusalem. Those earthly feasts are only 'pictures' of Heavenly realities. There is a tremendous difference between the earthly Zion and Mount Sinai. How much more difference is there, between the heavenly Zion – the true Jerusalem – and Mount Sinai!

If we've got that clearly in our minds, then this section, verses 18 to 24, becomes very easy to understand.

We look now, specifically, to verses 18 to 21, which talks about Mount Sinai.

We notice from verse 18 that Mount Sinai was a tangible mountain. It was a mountain you could touch. If one travels down the Red Sea the mount can be seen in the distance. It is a fact: it is there! It's a tangible mountain. But it was a terrifying manifestation to the Israelite's as we read in verse 18. A place of burning fire. The whirlwind. Darkness. Storm. And that more or less sums up Judaism. That's more or less sums up the Old Dispensation. The old dispensation is more or less completely occupied with things that you can touch and feel and see and hear and taste.

Whereas the gospel is taken up with spiritual realities. When you came to Christ, you didn't experience any of the repellent phenomena, of Sinai.

Mount Sinai is a tangible Mountain. Look now at verses 19 to 21,

You'll see that Mount Sinai was a terrifying mountain, because God spoke, in an intelligible voice. We read in Exodus that the people were terror-stricken. They pleaded, that God should not speak to them like that anymore. But that God should speak to them through a mediator. Through a go between. Because they were overcome with terror, by the voice of the Living God. Even Moses was afraid and quaked. Even Moses! He who had spoken with God 'face to face:' Trembled!

The author in verse 21 is quoting: from the Greek version of the Old Testament, together with a Jewish tradition which is evidently a true one since the author, under divine inspiration, uses it! Moses himself was overcome with terror by this voice of God. There was nothing inviting about Sinai. No one could approach Sinai, except Moses and Aaron. If so much as an animal, went over the border, onto the mountain: As we read in verse 20, it was immediately put to death. There was nothing inviting, nothing tender, nothing welcoming, about Sinai.

But the Gospel is tender. The Gospel is inviting. It invites us to come, as we have read earlier in the epistle, with boldness into the very presence of God! The Gospel religion is a religion of access. Whereas the religion of the Jew is a religion of exclusion!

When we became Christians it wasn't to something that is tangible. It wasn't to stand on the border of something terrifying, that we came. We didn't come to Mount Sinai. Verse 18, "You have not come ..." But look at verse 22: "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the Living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, "

So from verses 22 to 24 we read about this other mountain:

"We didn't come to Sinai when we became Christians that's something we left behind. We have come to Mount Zion!" The Apostle tells the Hebrews.

When we came to Christ, we didn't come to Sinai, to be terrified. We came to Zion to be welcomed. (Zion was the hill upon which Jerusalem was built and to the Jew it meant festive occasions; joy; pilgrimage. Somewhere where he longed to go. Loved to go. Jerusalem and the Temple spoke to him of welcome. Spoke to him of invitation. But like everything in the Old Testament it was all a 'picture' of Heavenly realities.)

[Aside] some have terrible problems with Old Testament prophecy. That God promises this to Jerusalem and some other thing to Jerusalem. He says this will happen to Zion then that will happen to Zion. This will happen to Israel and that will happen to Israel. And it is all taken literally. Whereas when the New Testament is read, it is found that Jerusalem is just a 'picture' of God's dwelling place. Zion is only an earthly picture of a heavenly reality. Israel is only an earthly picture of the true Israel. (Which is the people who belong to God!) So there is no trouble anymore with those Old Testament prophecies. They are not to be applied in an Old Testament sense, in these New Testament days.

We've come to Mount Zion. We haven't come to a mountain to stand on the fringe of the presence of God. As Christian's we've come into God's dwelling place. As we learnt earlier in the epistle. We haven't come to just stand and gaze at the Glory of God in terror. From a distance. We've come to the true Jerusalem. We've come to the City of the Living God. We've come to the very place where God can be known, experienced and loved. Where we can be embraced by Him. Where He is not a distant God, but a present God. Not One to intimidate us but to welcome us.

That is the great difference between the Gospel and the Old Testament dispensation. The gospel gives us access. How could it be that these Jews would think, of turning their back on a religion of access? To go back to a religion where they could only gaze on the glory of God from a distance. How could it be that they could turn their back, from knowing God, to merely, terrifyingly, admiring God. But that's what they were thinking of doing!

Have a second look at verse 22: "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the City of the Living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,..." then he goes on:

*... and to innumerable angels in festal gathering,* <sup>23</sup> *and to the assembly[1] of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,* If you were a Jew in 1st Century Palestine: You would leave your village; form a caravan with various accompanying animals fully laden and go in procession to Jerusalem. There would be all the members of your family. You would look around: these are all the people to whom you belong. You always went up to Jerusalem in a great company of people, the people to whom you belonged! You never went alone. That's the way it is in the Gospel Age: all the angels belong to you as a Christian.

The ministry of angels is something we enjoy as Christians. You enjoy the protection of angels. God has given you, into their charge. The early Church clearly believe that. When Peter knocked at the meeting door they couldn't believe that it was he, but at least they could believe it was his angel. (Acts 12:16) How much we owe, to the ministry of angels, we shall never know until we get to Glory! There are invisible spirits as we've already been told in this letter. Who are ministering spirits who serve us. We are the heirs of Salvation. We are the adopted sons of God. They are merely the servants of God. Therefore they serve the family members of God.

We've come to that innumerable company of angels. That's something we enjoy. They didn't enjoy that at Sinai! The angels shared in the mediation of the Law as we've read elsewhere. We've enjoyed the service of the angels. They're on the same side. The same household even if not members of the same family.

You've also come, (verse 23) to the General Assembly and Church of the firstborn, which are enrolled in heaven. From all round the world are the names of Christians who are enrolled in heaven. You belong to them all! In God's sight, they are a General Assembly, and Church. Throughout the world there are men and women who are called out. At the last day the General Assembly will meet.

We have a General Assembly. Representatives go once or twice a year to hear the Moderator and discuss business. However the members of the General Assembly are decided long before it actually meets. So it is with God's General Assembly when all Christian's will assemble one day. His church, nonetheless exists today, with the names already enrolled in heaven. They all belong to you. They're your travelling companions, as you 'go up' to Mount Zion.

Not only so, but verse 23 to the end: *... and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,* ... There are men and women who have died. You may be able to visit their graves. Their bodies were there but they are not. They are in a '2 Corinthians 5 situation'! They have left their bodies behind – they are at the moment 'unclothed'. But none the less, truly (spiritually) in the presence of Christ: "absent from the body present with the Lord." Awaiting the resurrection. So they are the 'spirits' of justified men. They are enjoying fellowship with God, not in the body, but only in the spiritual side of human-hood. Nonetheless truly with the Lord! Truly in a sinless condition.

They are righteous men made righteous by Christ's Righteousness and they are perfected, never to sin again or to be in a place of sin again. You also belong to them!

Such a 'great company' as we continue to the real Zion of God, the Celestial City. God's home, heaven. Who would really want to turn back?

[2080]

**May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.**

**It's Better to be a Christian – Pt 2**

per S Olyott

(review so far)

Last week we got to the point of saying that, today's Christians, belong to that company of spirits made perfect through Christ's righteousness, who are already present with the Lord yet, for now, absent from the body.

Which is not teaching, by the way, conscious contact with 'just men made perfect' but that we all belong together. Some of our number are now the spirits of just men and women made perfect! You don't feel that you've ceased to belong with them since they've died. You simply feel that they've gone on ahead. But they are as much a part of you as when you knew them in the flesh. We shall go into Glory one by one, with those whose affectionate love we once shared. Remembering them as those who are absent but not gone forever. That's what we mean when we say, "Mystic sweet communion with those whose rest is won:"<sup>1</sup> As we've seen earlier in this letter, these people observe us in our Christian lives. They belong to us; we belong to them. We're all in the same company!

Still considering verse 23: *and to God, the judge of all* . Now God is the judge of all! You'll never, ever stand at the final judgement, before men, but you will stand before God the judge of all. The Jew knew that – and stood afar off at Sinai and was afraid. But you have come – come – to the judge of all. You are already accepted and loved. There is a family relationship which exists between you and the Judge. He is not a distant, intimidating figure. The one who will judge you, is the one you have come to know, through Jesus Christ! That's one of the most comforting truths of all – of the gospel. Does the God, whom you know, condemn you today? Does He condemn you before the judgement bar? Could He? Does God, the judge of all, accept you, in Christ, today, yet cease to accept you, in Christ, on the day of Judgement?

Verse 24: You've come to Jesus! The Mediator of the New Covenant. You could never earn your way, by keeping the Covenant which God gave to Adam. You could never live perfectly! The life you could never have lived, Jesus has lived. The death you deserve to die for breaking God's Law, Jesus has died. Thousands of blessings flow to you, through the Lord Jesus Christ. Who has kept all the terms that you could never keep. You have entered into Covenant blessing which you haven't earned. Because there's a better Covenant that has been made: not just between God and Adam, but between God and the last Adam! He stood for you in that Covenant! All your salvation; your justification; your adoption, and your sanctification – your peace of conscience and assurance of God's love – everything else you enjoy. Comes to you through Jesus the mediator. It's to Him you've come!

Further in verse 24: ... *and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.* You have come to Christ's blood. When you became a Christian you were aware of your defilement. That there was nothing that could wash away that stain. Except the blood of Jesus! What makes you whole again? Nothing, but the blood of Jesus. "Oh! precious is the flow that makes me white as snow, no other fount I know, nothing but the blood of Jesus".<sup>2</sup>

You found that in coming to the one who died for sinners, your soul was washed. Because He took your place at the Cross. Yet that blood doesn't cry for vengeance, like the blood of Abel. That blood of Christ doesn't cry for revenge and for justice and for judgement. It doesn't cry for penalty or for punishment. The blood of Jesus Christ speaks: pardon and peace and cleansing, forgiveness and acceptance and welcome. That's the blood to which you came.

Judaism can only bring you where the people came at Sinai. They could admire God; recognise God as God; recognise Him as holy; recognise Him as fearsome. But they never enjoyed anything of the things we're speaking about this morning. They never received acceptance of God. The forgiveness of all their sins. They never received the blessing of the ministry of angels. Fellowship with each other – like we know it – and those who have gone before. They never knew what it was to come into the very city of the Living God. They were always on the outside: afar off! Whereas we, by Christ, have come in.

It's better to be a Christian than a Jew! The Apostle cannot understand why they want to turn their back on all that! And go back to where they were before.

Now we come to the second part of the passage, verses 25 to 29:

It's better to be a Christian than a Jew! What privileges we have! Verse 25 to the end of the chapter tells us that the higher the privilege the greater your responsibility. We shall paraphrase this passage as we go through it verse by verse:

Verse 25. "O Christians," he's saying, "the God who has done all this for you, is speaking to you." He doesn't say God HAS spoken to you. He's saying that the God that has done all this for you: IS speaking to you! "It seems to me", says the Apostle, "that you've made up your mind to turn your back on the Gospel, and you've closed your ears to all appeals, to do otherwise. But don't close your ears to Him. He's speaking to you: When He spoke on Earth – that is at Mount Sinai – those who refused to hear Him didn't get away with it. If that was true then, how much more true is it, now that God speaks to you, not from Earth, but from heaven."

Some people find verse 25 difficult. We could put it like this: The Great God lives in a dimension which is His own dwelling place. He condescended at Sinai, to come into our dimension, so that his presence could be physically felt and seen. At that

particular mountain: Sinai. That was a great act of condescension by God. But God no longer speaks to His world, by tremors and an audible voice from Sinai. His dimension, the place of His eternal existence, is Heaven (which is not a million miles away but side by side with where we are now). He speaks to His world, now, from heaven. But you don't hear an audible voice. He's in the place of His glory. He hasn't come into our realm. Now, He speaks from where He is, through nature; He speaks in His Word; He speaks by His Spirit. There is something that is much more exalted and noble about hearing God speak through his Word and by His Spirit than there ever was by hearing God speak at Sinai. It's a greater thing to hear God speak from His Book, and His Spirit, than to have heard Him at Mount Sinai. It's a greater privilege. We've lost sight of that in the Christian Church. There are very few who tremble anymore at God's Word. If God spoke physically so that the buildings shook, our hearts would be humbled and we would be brought to attention. But now that the God speaks through his Spirit using human voices; and through His Book by his Spirit, we tend to think that that is lesser and forget that it is the greater!

No! If those who heard him speak from Earth didn't get away with it when they were warned, but refused to heed the warning, how much more will we not get away with it now that He warns us from heaven? We should give much more serious attention (as the Apostle told us in chapter 2), to the teachings of the gospel than we have ever given to the physical manifestation of God in Old Testament days. Consider verse 26. "Once", says the Apostle, "God's voice shook the Earth. And do you remember what God's prophet Haggai said? He says, 'Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.'<sup>3</sup> Verse 27: Think about those words: Yet... once... more... Because things that can be shaken are one day going to be shaken away!"

"I'm talking", says the Apostle, "about things that are made. I'm talking about the physical creation (the one that I can touch; that I can see; the one that I can smell and hear and feel). That physical creation is one day, by an act of God going to be 'shaken' away! And when that occurs only things that can't be 'shaken' away will remain." In other words the 'spiritual' realities will be all that remain.

All those material things in the Old Testament, were material 'pictures' of spiritual realities. One day everything material will be gone, all that will remain will be the spiritual reality. 'These things shall vanish all – the city of God remaineth.' said Luther.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Haggai 2:6 Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land [KJV]

<sup>4</sup> From an alternative translation of verse 5 of REJOICE! 316 Martin Luther:

*God's word, for all their craft and force,  
One moment will not linger;*

*But spite of hell shall have its course—*

*'Tis written by his finger.*

*And though they take our life,*

*Goods, honor, children, wife,*

*Yet is their profit small:*

*These things shall vanish all—*

*The City of God remaineth.*

The time will come when the Earth itself, and therefore all earthly 'pictures' ... The time will come when the physical universe and therefore all physical 'pictures' will be 'shaken' away. They will be no more. When that happens all that will be left will be the spiritual realities: God,... angels,... men and women!. That day will be the downfall of every materialist.

Whatever we've set our hearts on, the things we admire and uphold, or carefully examine their worth, on that day these things will be no more.

It will also be the downfall of every Jew as in the context of the Apostle's concern. Because he sees that the Jews, and their history, has been caught up in so much paraphernalia – all the ritual; ceremony; sacrifice; and priesthood. All that paraphernalia of Old Testament 'pictures'. All the outward Glory of those 'pictures'. The day will come when it's all gone! The only things that will remain will be the spiritual realities that were being instanced, all along.

Verse 28: Now if you're not a member of God's spiritual Kingdom, what will be your condition at the Last Day? At the last day you'll be naked before your God. In the Revelation we read of people who run to the mountains run to the rocks. They say, "Hills: fall on us; mountains: cover us." Because they're exposed to the glare of God! There are no mountains; no caves; no rocks no hills. There is nowhere to flee! They are naked before the eyes of God. If you're not a member of God's spiritual Kingdom. If you're not one of those redeemed Souls, who are God's accepted people and who are ruled over by God, how will you be when The Day comes when all physical realities are gone and only spiritual realities remain?

"When everything else is gone", says the Apostle, "we Christian's will be safe."

<sup>28</sup> *Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken,* We don't come to an earthly Temple anymore because we come to the real dwelling place of God. We don't look at that Shekhinah Glory – that picture or manifestation of God – any more. Because we know the invisible God. I don't engage in all the 'pictures' because I know Him of which all the 'pictures' speak. The spiritual realities are what I lay hold on. Since if we haven't laid hold on those, what will we do when all the 'pictures' are gone. "Why flee from a spiritual religion back to a religion of 'types' and 'pictures'?", says the Apostle.

So, we have a Kingdom that cannot be moved. Let us be thankful. Let us stop and render thanks to God! And thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe (fear). "There is nothing more important", says the Apostle, "to giving your lives in reverence to God, and serving God and fearing God (giving due affectionate reverence). Your chief business in life is with God. Your chief business is dealing with God. Why turn your back on a religion which brings you to deal with God and go back to just the admiration of godly things."

There are two alternatives in life: The alternative of living and dying and not pleasing God or approaching him in Christ; living and dying, seeking to please Him.

When heaven and earth is gone, remember which alternative will stand, because the day will come when you are alone with God. And the God whom you will be alone with is a consuming fire! That being so how can I think of going back: Of pleasing myself; of turning my back on him; of being the same as everybody else. How can I think of living for what I can see, and what I can have, and what I can hear, and what I can touch! These truths being so, how can I think of anything, except pleasing Him – with whom we have to do.

[2182]

**May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.**

**He Is Risen!**

Mark 16:6b

**“He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.”**

Our Worship Service today has been joyous and upbeat – deliberately so. We rejoice – as we should – in recalling and reaffirming the Resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ. That resurrection that once for all shows God's acknowledgement and acceptance of the atonement of Jesus for all our sins (and for those of all believers, past, present and future). God's confirmation of our justification through faith in Christ. Is this not the best news! THE absolute good news. Rejoice!

On the basis of God's revelation through Scripture, we are convinced and convicted of our sin. Of how far we fall short of the perfect righteousness of God and how remote our lives are from those originally prepared for us before the 'fall' at Eden. He has made known through the 'Law and the Prophets', that in accord with His perfect justice, left to ourselves, our only 'wage of our sin' is death.

But because of His mercy and love and by His grace, he has provided, from before time began, a plan, a Covenant of Redemption. He came among us in human form, as the man Jesus; who lived a perfect, righteous: human life (as we were meant to be able to do); suffered an obscene, humiliating and agonising death as the substitutionary, sacrificial, atoning death on the cross; and was raised to life, by the Father, as the Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Affirming, once and for all, the redemption from sin for all believers. *All who call on the name of the Lord will be saved.* (1 Cor 1:2)

**How great Thou art!**

The risen Christ is the 'last Adam', the 'first born of the dead'. The one from whom our model and hope of our own resurrection at the last day is derived.

Concerning our resurrection, Paul preached the following Sermon to the people at Corinth, where some erstwhile believers did not accept the resurrection of the body: (1 Cor 15:12-19)

*<sup>12</sup> Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? <sup>13</sup> But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. <sup>14</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. <sup>15</sup> We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. <sup>16</sup> For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. <sup>17</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup> Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. <sup>19</sup> If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.*

Sproul<sup>5</sup>, in commenting on this last verse, says that enemies of the Christian Church should not be angry with us, rather pity us, for if, in their understanding of the purpose and value of life, our future hope, based on the resurrection of Christ is false, and our resurrection to glory with God is a myth, then we have forfeit much of the fun of this, once-only, brief existence. Post-modern man, shares much of his philosophy with the Greek Epicureans: who say, "Nature and reason show us that pleasure is the sole good and that pain is the sole evil. Eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die! " Most of those around us reveal this goal for living.

Paul in this one of three approaches to the purpose, truth and value of the resurrection uses a method which effectively says: if the resurrection is false everything else we believe and trust in is false.

In the 70's of the eighteenth century (that is the 1770s) a champion of modern atheism, Immanuel Kant, grudgingly used a similar technique to argue that mankind should live 'as if there were a God'. In brief he argued that by pure reason one could not prove or derive the existence of a God. A point of view that was taken up with vigour by subsequent philosophers. However he did conclude that from a practical point of view, for the survival of civilisation, the following could be argued:

- civil behaviour depends on there being people who act ethically, have a sense of duty and are constrained by pangs of conscience;
- for enough people to act ethically there must be an expectation of justice;
- since the world demonstrates that there is a lack of justice. The wicked often prosper. There must be an existence beyond the grave;
- then, there must be a judge, who has the attributes of:
  - perfect righteousness;
  - omniscience (knows all circumstances and events);
  - absolute power and authority, to be able to enforce justice.

That is, a God. And a life hereafter.

Paul, however used further arguments. Like Plato he uses analogy with the sowing of seeds. They are buried to death as it were and through the design of God are brought to new life. Different in form and function from the seed itself.<sup>6</sup>

Thirdly, Paul, right at the beginning of the Chapter, uses the greatest resource available, through the guidance of the Spirit, to Christians: Scripture. (1 Cor 15:1-11)

*<sup>1</sup>Now I would remind you, brothers,[1] of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, <sup>2</sup> and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.*

5 R C Sproul from an audio sermon titled: The Resurrection of Jesus Christ. <http://healtheland.wordpress.com/2007/12/16/rc-sproul-the-resurrection-of-jesus-christ/>

6 Paul goes on to say: (1 Cor 15:42-49)

*So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.*

*If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven. (NIV)*

<sup>3</sup> For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. <sup>6</sup> Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup> Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. <sup>8</sup> Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. <sup>9</sup> For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. <sup>10</sup> But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace towards me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. <sup>11</sup> Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

#### Footnotes:

1. 1 Corinthians 15:10 Or brothers and sisters; also verses 6, 31, 50, 58

Note how Paul follows the steps in his narration with the words “ *according to the Scriptures*”. The prophecies found in the scriptures. Then gives a roll call of witnesses. There's Peter and the rest of the twelve, 500 at once, many of whom were still alive as Paul was writing to Corinth. And finally Paul himself. What other event in ancient history is so supported by eye-witnesses? Did they just find an empty tomb, and surmise, against all common experience that Jesus had risen from the dead. No! He appeared to them. They saw Him. One, Thomas, had to see Him for himself, and then fell to his knees with, “My Lord and my God!”

Many today describe the resurrection of Jesus as a myth.<sup>7</sup>

Faced with the testimony of Scripture (more written evidence than any other significant event of 2000 years ago); the witnesses cited by Paul; not to mention the lives converted throughout the centuries by the power of the resurrection, what is it that generates the automatic assumption that it all must be a 'myth'?<sup>8</sup>

- 7 A journalist reported that someone had claimed to have found the bones of Jesus. He went on to say that most archaeologists had poured scorn on the report. So far so good, perhaps this journalist was one of the 'good guys'. Then in an endeavour to convey that a large proportion of the American population believe in Jesus' resurrection, he couldn't resist putting it this way. “ 78% of Americans believe in *the myth* of the resurrection of Jesus.” Despite his early promise his true colours show through!
- 8 The modern science worshipping population, have only seen people who die, stay dead. Scientific data gathering has no counter examples. No need then to devise a plausible explanation that will do for now until more data is discovered, requiring a new analogy, model, theory: to, in turn be overturned in the future. (Imagine a time before radio waves had been 'discovered', what would science have been able to say, or theorise about, when considering the notion of long distance communication occurring practically instantaneously. Never shown, not possible, therefore a myth!) To be precise modern science has only seen sinful people (under God's immutable sentence of death), stay dead! But was it much different for the witnesses in Israel and Galilee, and the subsequent believers. Their common experience was the same as ours, once you die you stay dead. Yet they saw the Risen Jesus. They believed. Their lives were changed. Did they say that some percentage of the population believed in the *myth of the* resurrection of Jesus. No they and multitudes of believers ever since have made this the basis of their preaching, faith and works.

To the New Testament writers it was impossible for Christ not to rise. The perfect man, with no sin had not earned the sentence of death. Even His temporary death on the Cross was impossible except that He took on the imputation of our sin. Once this was accomplished and God accepted the offering, Jesus had to be raised. God's visible sign of the person of Jesus and our salvation through Him.

Consider the creation of all life. By God alone. The only one with the power of life in and of Himself. The eternally, self existing God. Whose justice and decrees say that the result of sin and disobedience of His holy laws is death. This is our universal experience. We all die and the dead stay dead. This same God also decrees that by His Grace, those who, by the drawing of His Spirit, come to saving faith in the atonement of Jesus, are justified, as demonstrated by the Resurrection of Jesus, and are preserved to their own resurrection in eternal glory. What is so hard to imagine? The creator of all life can raise those He chooses to life through Christ! To say He couldn't is the impossibility.

Let us give our final word to Paul, who in preaching to the sages of Athens, introduced the true and only living God and His Son Jesus Christ, saying,

*<sup>29</sup> Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man.*

*<sup>30</sup> The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, <sup>31</sup> because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."*

(Acts 17:29-31)

God has set the time, the clock is ticking. God does not merely invite people to come to Jesus (as we do), He commands them! He commands all people everywhere to repent. Will you!

**Pray God this will be so, for all the saints present today. Amen [1598]**

## **We Must Make Progress in the Christian Life**

per S Olyott

(review so far)

This sermon, which we will take 2 weeks to deliver, appears as a very personal one from Stuart Olyott, so I will transcribe and read it in his, 'first person' retaining the particular references to his home town at the time he recorded it.

"If you want to live as a Christian, the passage we read, chapter 13 of Hebrews verses 1 to 6, is a passage of very, very great, importance to you.

This text is particularly: very precious to me. I became a Christian, just before my 15th birthday. Went straight back to school. Told my friends I was a Christian, and they were cynical to say the least, and down-right enemies, very often, of the Christian Faith. At that stage an old Christian friend, gave me verse 6 on a piece of card: 'We may boldly say the Lord is my helper and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.'

I cut that card out and in those far off rich days I had a wallet and I put it in that. Looking at it several times a day. Finding great support and strength from that verse. (Although in fact, strictly speaking, that verse was taken out of context, as we shall see.)

That we may boldly say the Lord is my helper, my helper. That meant a great amount to me! As a young Christian. Not just 'our' helper, 'my' helper, and I will not fear what men should do unto 'me'. Me!

Well since May we've been looking at Hebrews. We've no time to do the whole of the Final Chapter in one sermon nor not even maybe in two. Because this Final Chapter is so particularly helpful. For those of you who want to live the Christian life on a Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday Friday, Saturday and also on a Sunday.

For 12 chapters we've looked at the glories of the Lord Jesus Christ. For 12 chapters we've been told that if we turn our back on the one who is the light of God's glory: there is only one place we can go – 'outer darkness'. For 12 chapters we've been told that we are required to make progress. Progress! To go on, and on, and on, in the Christian life. Now the Apostle is going to bring his letter to a close, in that spirit of telling us that we must make progress. He's going to give a number of brief statements. Very helpful, brief statements. He's going to point out to us that there are particular areas, in our Christian life, to which we should give special attention. We look therefore at the first 6 verses.

There are special areas. Particular areas: to which you should give more than the ordinary amount of attention. In your practical Christian living.

The first one is in verses 1 to 3: We will call that: 'give particular attention to your relationships with other Christians.' Then we'll look at verses 4 to 6: 'give particular attention, not to be infected with certain worldly attitudes.' (together that will occupy us for two weeks)

So verses 1 to 3: As a Christian who wants to make progress in the Christian life. As a Christian after 12 chapters of Hebrews. You realise how important it is to go on, and on, and on, in spiritual living! You are now going to be told, that one area where you must give particular attention is to this question about your relationships with your fellow Christians.

The attitude you're to have is in verse one. The attitude which is to prevail amongst us is one of 'Brotherly Love'. I want to make a distinction here, and hope that you can follow it, because there's a million miles between two different attitudes. There are some Christians who say, "I will consider that person to be my Brother, and I will behave accordingly." That is not what the Apostle is saying! The Christian attitude is: That person 'is' my brother! He's not someone to be considered to be my brother, he 'is' my brother. I have to give myself to a practical display of that fact. The Christian church is not an organisation. It is not a society. It's certainly not a club. The Christian church above everything else, is a brother-hood. The chief word used for Christians, in the New Testament is 'brother'. Brother, not 'bro'. Brother!

This means, in simple language, that every believer. Even that one, whom I don't like! Is my brother. I'm called upon by this verse, to remember that I have no choice in the matter. He is not someone to be considered – to be my brother – he 'is' my brother! He is my brother, whether I like it or not.

Now there really is a million miles between these two attitudes. This scripture is not calling on you to behave as though it were true. It's not saying, "treat this man as if he were a brother. It is saying that it is true, and therefore display the fact." Because every sin against a fellow Christian is a sin against a brother. And therefore a sin, a grief towards, a sin against the Father.

Now look at verse 2: This brotherliness, extends, not only to the well-known members, of the same Church, but to all believers. Even those believers who are strangers to you, and are passing through. It's very easy for us to fall into the trap of thinking, that brotherliness is only something that extends to those persons that I know personally. But the Apostle is insisting, that if you're going to make progress, in the Christian life, brotherliness is to extend, to those whom you don't know. Who are strangers! Who are passing through. We are called upon, in verse 2, to entertain them. Now remember this is not a 'song and the dance'. We're not required to entertain them in that sense. The Apostle is calling upon us to be hospitable to them.

Now what does that mean? Now let's say that you now turn around in the pew. There to your surprise, just a few pews away, is your brother – from Stoke-on-Trent or Farnworth, or Swansea or somewhere else. How would you react, if you suddenly turned round now: There is your brother, whom you haven't seen for a few weeks or a few months. Straight after the Service you go straight up to him. You say, "Great to see you. Why are you here? I didn't know you were coming. Have you got any where to go to lunch? Are you staying somewhere? How's the wife? How's the children? How's this, how's that?" Because he is your brother!

That was particularly important in the First Century! The First Century inns we're not the choice places to stay. Christians passing through, would look for the Christian, Congregation and gather with it. Immediately they were to be received. Embraced as the 'brothers', that they really are. You were to be hospitable to them. As you would do for your own brother. Without reservation you would take him home give him a meal. Put him up! You'd do the same to your own sister. Therefore do the same to your fellow Christians. Treat them for what they are: Brothers.

If you look in the New Testament you will see that: the use of the home – very important in the New Testament. Many Churches met in homes. Many people have their Christian lives, sorted out, in homes. There's a very close connection, between the advance of the gospel, and the use of the Christian home, in the New Testament. Scores of hundreds, and thousands, and millions of lives, have been enriched and strengthened, in Christian hospitality ever since. It's been one of the most powerful means, under God, of doing good in the Christian Church.

"And remember", says the Apostle (verse 2) "that when you give hospitality, it is not just the guests, who benefit. But this Ministry in the past has been rewarded by the most enriching experiences." Here was Abraham, and here are three friends. He doesn't know who they are! He quickly recognises one of them as the Lord! It then becomes evident, after a little while, that the other two are angels. Here is Lot! True – he is in Sodom, but he has an open door for strangers – he welcomes in these two unusual men, and finds out shortly afterwards that they are angels. ... *some have entertained Angels unawares.*<sup>9</sup>

I'm not promising you that that's going to happen, when you invite someone home to lunch. The point being made is not whether we should weigh up whether such and such a person is an angel or not, (because we will very quickly discover that he isn't -- usually because he has some annoying little habit that is not at all angelic), However the point being made is: it's not only the people who receive hospitality who are enriched. The point being made is that God has added surprising blessings to those who offer hospitality.

9 Who were the three men who visited Abraham in Genesis 18: <https://www.gotquestions.org/three-men-Genesis-18.html>

However look at verse three now: What about the Christians that you never meet? The Christians that you never met are just as much Brothers as the ones that you do meet. If you heard today (verse 3) that your brother was in prison. What would you do? The first thing you might do, is to try to place yourself in his shoes. *Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them;* You think to yourself, "Now what would he need in a prison cell?" He'd like to get a letter? He'd perhaps like to have a visit? Are there any clothes he needs? Does he need writing paper or books? Immediately your mind would start thinking. After all he is your brother.

Then you'd start thinking about his loved ones. How is his wife managing while he's in? And how about the children? Are their needs being met? Could I ring them up to encourage them? Should I start thinking about arranging a holiday for them, next summer? Because, perhaps they won't be able to have one otherwise. That's the way your mind would tick – because your brother is in prison. And some of our Brothers are in prison! Not as criminals. But for the reason that they've been faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ. And it's no good my saying to them, "I don't know you." Because they are my Brothers. And what am I doing?

Now Chapter 13 verse 3, the second part: ... ; *and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.* What would you do, today if you heard that your brother was in bed ill. The word 'adversity' in this context particularly applies to illness! So if you heard today, that your brother was ill, what would you do?. Well, immediately your thoughts would be, "What must it have been like for him?" And it wouldn't be hard for you to enter into his experience because you're not exempt from the same thing. You've been ill yourself. You're in the same sort of body. You're prone to illness like he is. " ... *and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.* So as soon as you heard he was ill. Soon as you could. You would write; visit; if possible, you would phone. You would take steps to see that the family's looked after. You would do your best to spiritually encourage, your sick brother. To keep him up with the news. There's a whole host of practical things that you could do at once.

You wouldn't say to yourself, "I have several other brothers. It's up to them!" Would you? Even if all of your other brothers, we're doing their utmost, to help your ill brother, you would still do your part! However much they were doing. You wouldn't argue that looking after a sick brother is the work of one particular member of the family. You would say, "It's the job of all of us!" You would all rally round and do your bit.

And yet, lots and lots of believers are this very day languishing because of lack of pastoral care and brotherly affection. Because in the Christian Church the myth has growing up, in complete opposition to the Word of God, that when a

Brother is ill, it is more the work of one member of the family, than another, to show practical care, for an ill, afflicted Brother.

And there are many, many other needs not being met, because the same thinking is there: that this is more the work of one member of the family, than another. It's true that he is my Brother, but there are many other Brothers in the family, who can do it so why should I. It's an acute case of double think. What we would never do in our own natural family, we are willing to do in our spiritual family, where Scripture teaches that the bond, that binds us together is closer, than that in our natural family.

The day I treat all other believers for what they are – my Brothers – not only will my own spiritual life make progress, but so will theirs!

[Incidentally, perhaps the point needs to be made here, that very often Christians, because they have (natural) brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers in the fellowship, consider that they have a prime responsibility to them. I really believe that that needs challenging. True, that we have a responsibility, naturally to fathers and mothers sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, because of that 'common grace' relationship which binds us together. But remember, that any other Christian brother or sister, is as much my brother or sister as my natural brother or sister. Any other Christian brother or sister is as much a relative in the Lord, as any other relative.

A good deal of fellowship has been inhibited. A good deal of false loyalty has been shown, because people have been willing to be less Brotherly to others, because they happen to have a 'common grace' relationship, with certain other people. I'm quite sure that the Apostle's words here, are challenging that sort of thinking.] Give particular attention to your relationships with other Christians. "Let Brotherly Love Continue."

[2397]

**May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.**

Next week we will continue with verses 4 to 6: